QL: OUR FIRST LOOK

by Norm Lehfeldt

Only five months after it was ordered, the QL has finally arrived!

This is a preliminary report based on a relatively brief exposure to the machine and its accompanying software, so any conclusions reached must be regarded as tentative.

The QL keyboard operates smoothly and positively, although it produces more noise as each key bottoms than does the T/S 2068.

But for those accustomed to earlier Sinclair and Sinclair-derived machines, there is more to get used to than a new keyboard.

The single-stroke entry of BASIC commands is gone. Instead one must type in each command as on most other computers. The process is simplified by a large number of permissible abbreviations and the fact that the computer makes no distinction between upper and lower case letters in SuperBASIC commands--for example entering "rem" causes the QL to return the token "REMark" in a program line. There is still no full-screen editor. Much as on earlier machines, program lines are entered and edited in a work space at the bottom of the screen.

My impression may change as I become more accustomed to the system but at present the whole arrangement seems more cumbersome than the older one. If one enters "LIST" as a command without specifying line numbers, the whole program scrolls rapidly by unless one has the presence of mind to press "BREAK" (control and space) when the portion of the program one wishes to inspect goes by. It takes a cool head and a quick trigger finger.

As for SuperBASIC itself--it is obviously a very powerful structured language. DEFined PROCedures are intended to replace GOTO's and GOSUB's, for example. These can be called by their names which are stored in a table. Thus program execution speed is relatively independent of program size. Months will be required to fully explore the capabilities of this sophisticated new language.

When the QL powers up it offers a choice of TV or Monitor modes. The Monitor mode offers the full high-resolution, 85-column display (after entering this mode one may choose the lower-resolution display if desired), while the TV mode generates a shunken display area in high or low resolution to accommodate the over scan and resolution capabilities of TV receivers. As you no doubt have heard, many standard monitors will not display the full 85 columns because the QL presents a horizontal video line somewhat longer than standard. My Taxan monitor displays 82 or 83 columns after adjustment of the picture width (adjustment of picture height was also required). It is possible to get satisfactory results by selecting the TV mode when using a monitor. The QL generates 50-cycle, non-interlaced video in the monitor mode. Some monitors may not be able to sync to it. Others will produce noticable flicker in large, light-colored areas of the display.

On the 8-pin DIN connector there are; RGB color, PAL composite, monochrome composite, vertical sync, and composite sync outputs. No NTSC color composite output is provided. An RCA connector provides channel 3 or 4 NTSC color output. Sound reproduction is only through the QL's internal speaker.

So far, the only other interfacing I have tried is connecting my Star printer to the Serial 1 port through a Serial-to-Centronics converter ($49.95 from Curry Computer). As you can see, it works.

C O N T E N T S

EBZUG NEWS
by Rick Link

I missed September's meeting. We're in the ninth inning of contract negotiations on the job in Vallejo and made front page news (good news I hope) - so I have been busy. There is always some way to make time for computers though, which I did.

First, of interest to Timex users. The Bay Area has the possibility of profitting from 2068s in the classroom. David Gray from Antioch has been extending his computer education (on TS1000 and 2068) to possible commercial program writing. I've seen two of his programs ...a game and a graphic utility. The game is interesting; smooth graphics and arcade-style sound combine to make a new maze/chase game. The graphic utility, "Dot To Dot", a combination of BASIC and machine code, gives the user many options when drawing on the 2068. You use your joystick to plot endpoints which connect when you "click" the joystick button. You can scroll the screen in any direction, create circles, fill hollow spaces and draw freehand. Contact me if you are interested in David's programs. I'll let him know.

Woody had another new computer from DAK - a Spectravideo MSX machine with 40 programs for $169. Of course, I like my 2068 better, but if you're looking for an inexpensive entry level microsoft basic machine, you could do worse. A lot of the forty programs were very "basic", but can always be helpful in learning how to use the machine. Supposedly you can expand the machine to include a printer interface, diskdrive, modem, etc. The printer interface is available at the same time of purchase while the other

items would have to come from Europe or Japan from other MSX machines. If you're interested in buying one, talk to Woody; he has returned his but can share his experience with it.

Woody presided over the last meeting and wanted me to welcome new members:

Sid Melucci
Dale Alhstrom
Kirk Adams
Courtney DuBois
Myles Cohen (of New York)

Woody reports that there is still a lot of interest in the TS1000 and appropriate hardware, assembly language and FORTH. If any of these items interest you, come to the next EBZUG meeting where you will find others with similar interests.

PUG NEWS
by George Mockridge

We had a pleasant surprise at our September meeting...Norm Lehfeldt showed us his new Sinclair QL. This long-awaited event provided hope that there is a possible future for Sinclair computers in the U.S. Norm had only received his QL a few days before our gathering and was still learning the ropes; he has promised an interesting demonstration for our October meeting.

Speaking of meetings, it was decided to schedule a December PUG meeting this year. In the past, we skipped the December meeting because of the proximity to Christmas, but this year the meeting date will arrive on the 15th. That leaves the next weekend open for last minute shopping.

While on the subject of Christmas (isn't it amazing how one subject leads to another?), please remember the Word Puzzle program I presented in the August 1984 TIMELINEZ. This program is great for preparing a small personalized gift to send to a friend or relative who would only get a card otherwise. I will give some examples at the meeting. (A tape copy of the Word Puzzle program is in the Software Library.)

Now that we are on the subject of the Software Library, I would like to call your attention to several recent TS 1000/1500 program donations. Barbara Stolle has adapted the 2068 Tape Label program from the July issue of TIMELINEZ so that 1000/1500 users can get their tape collections in order. (See article in this issue.)

David Docker has sent us two interesting tapes. The first is a nifty little program which keeps track of dates and the second is based on the OLD SHELL GAME or "Hey kid, bet you can't find the pea!". (An article on this is presented elsewhere is this issue.) Since I retired from my TS 1000 some time ago, I have not been able to try these out, but I am sure that they will work OK.

Finally, the mention of work reminds me that the TIMELINEZ staff plans to take a rest during November. Please make a note of the November 17 meeting date because you will not receive a newsletter to remind you.

SEE YOU SOON.

```
********************************
        NOTICE!!!
********************************
This issue  is for  the months
of  October and November.  The
December issue  will be out in
the first part of that month.
********************************
```

SVSTUG NEWS
by Bill Miller

(Editor's Note: Bill's column on Silicon Valley activities will resume in the next issue.)

PROGRAM WIPEOUT

```
 10> REM *** PROGRAM WIPEOUT ***
 20 POKE 23613,2: POKE 23614,91
 30 POKE 23298,0: POKE 23299,0
 40 REM **********************
100 REM ** BEGINNING OF PROGRAM
110 FOR N=1 TO 22
120 PRINT "DO NOT TRY TO BREAK
THIS PROGRAM"
130 NEXT N
140 PAUSE 50: CLS : PAUSE 50
150 GO TO 110
```

```
*******************************************
*                                         *
*   THIS SENTENCE CONTAINS EXACTLY         *
*   TROMBONE SEVEN WORDS.                  *
*                                         *
*******************************************
```

HOW TO PUNCH OUT YOUR BANKER or
THEY LAUGHED WHEN I SAT DOWN TO PAY

by Terry Meade

"HomeBanking, the newest electronic service from Bank of America, lets you control your banking like never before. You can pay routine bills and transfer funds between accounts, all in a matter of minutes with your computer. And you can do it all from 6 a.m. to midnight, 7 days a week for just $8 a month plus your regular checking account charges." So says one of Bank of America's latest HomeBanking brochures.

Using any of the Sinclair or Timex family of computers plus a modem and a nearby telephone, you can get to your HomeBanker even after regular business hours, and in a flash. It sure beats standing in lines at a bank counter!

You can dial up your HomeBanker on a local TYMNET number, and then using software that comes with the ByteBack or Westridge modems you can display the status of your accounts as of the previous business day. You can move funds between savings or checking accounts, or check your Visa account to see if there's enough credit left to take the lady or gentleman of your life out to dinner.

And you can pay your various bills on any particular business day of your choosing. Bank of America has hundreds of accounts that you can access for bill paying service. The list includes such stalwarts as Sears, Macys, GMAC, MaBell, AAA, the gas and electric company, plus anybody else that you or the bank can talk into joining the system. You can even make the premium payments on the insurance policies that you took out to pay for Junior and Missy's college education.

The BankAmerica program also includes two-way message service between you and the HomeBank computer so that you can ask questions about your account(s). This bulletin board provides banking announcements, discusses new service being added, and provides guidance on how to solve simple connection problems between your terminal and the data bank. There is even talk about including electronic shopping with local merchants and the possibility that stock broker service might soon be available. And, to top it all off, all this data will print out on your TS 2040 or any other properly interfaced printer.

So, if you want convenient access to your accounts and an end to standing in lines at bank counters, or if you just hanker to pay your bills at 10 o'clock at night from the comfort of your hot tub, you might want to consider joining the HomeBank crowd who are regularly punching out their banker. Then you too can laugh as you set down to pay.

There's only one problem. To get it on with your HomeBanker you will still have to go stand in line at your nearest Bank of America counter...in order to get an application.

This program is based on the OLD SHELL GAME or "Hey kid, bet you can't find the Pea!!!" The game starts the player off with $100.00 You can bet any part of your bank roll. After the introductory screen (Title), you are advanced into the game. The screen shows you your current holdings and asks you to enter your bet. The three numbered cups are shuffled around. You are then asked to enter your guess. Enter 1,2, or 3. You are told, Right or Wrong, and shown where the pea really was. Your new balance will be shown and after a short pause the screen will reset for your next attempt. The play continues until you lose all your money. When you have lost all your money, the screen will change and give you a recap of your activities. You will be told the total number of attempts, the number of correct responces, and the percentage of times you were correct of all attempts. Beware... This game is catching!!!

FROM: DAVID B. DOCKER
      M.D.U.G. (MOJAVE DESERT USERS GROUP)
      P.O. BOX: 87
      EDWARDS, CA. 93523

```
70 LET R=0
80 LET Q=0
90 LET B=100
100 PRINT AT 5,3; "THE FAMOUS 3
SHELL GAME"
110 PRINT AT 8,0; "YOU START WIT
H A BANK OF $100"
120 PRINT AT 10,0; "THE HOUSE PA
YS DOUBLE ON A WIN"
130 PRINT AT 12,0; "YOU MAY BET
ALL OR PART OF YOUR MONEY."
140 PRINT AT 19,4; "PRESS AN
Y TO BEGIN"
150 PAUSE 4E4
490 CLS
492 LET Q=Q+1
495 FAST
500 PRINT AT 10,5; "            "
510 PRINT AT 11,7; "|"; AT 11,21;
"|"
520 PRINT AT 12,7; "|"; AT 12,21;
"|"
530 PRINT AT 13,7; "|"; AT 13,21;
"|"
540 PRINT AT 14,7; "|"; AT 14,21;
"|"
550 PRINT AT 15,6; "    "
560 PRINT AT 15,20; "    "
570 PRINT AT 9,6; "           "
580 PRINT AT 6,7; "(1)"; AT 6,13;
"(2)"; AT 6,19; "(3)"
590 SLOW
600 REM BETTING ROUTINE
610 PRINT AT 17,0; "YOUR HOLDING
S... $"; B
620 PRINT AT 19,0; "ENTER YOUR B
ET"
630 INPUT C
640 PRINT AT 19,0; "YOUR BET IS
$ "; C
650 FOR J=1 TO 10
660 NEXT J
800 FOR I=1 TO 10
810 PRINT AT 9,6; "           "
820 PRINT AT 9,6; "           "
830 PRINT AT 9,6; "           "
840 PRINT AT 9,6; "           "
850 PRINT AT 9,6; "           "
860 NEXT I
900 REM RANDOMISM
910 RAND
920 LET N=INT (RND*3)+1
930 PRINT AT 2,0; "WHERE IS THE
PEA ???"
940 INPUT D
950 IF D<>N THEN GOTO 3000
960 REM CORRECT ANSWER ROUTINE
970 PRINT AT 3,0; "     3L ARE CORR
ECT"
975 LET R=R+1
980 IF N=1 THEN PRINT AT 7,6; "
"; AT 9,6; "    "
990 IF N=2 THEN PRINT AT 7,12; "
"; AT 9,12; "    "
995 IF N=3 THEN PRINT AT 7,18; "
"; AT 9,18; "    "
1000 REM BALANCE CORRECTION
1010 LET B=B+(C*2)
1020 PRINT AT 17,0; "
"
1030 PRINT AT 17,0; "YOUR BALANCE
IS $ "; B
1040 PAUSE 50
1050 GOTO 490
3000 REM WRONG ANSWER ROUTINE
3010 PRINT AT 3,0; "    YOU ARE WRON
G"
3020 IF N=1 THEN PRINT AT 7,6; "
"; AT 9,6; "    "
3030 IF N=2 THEN PRINT AT 7,12; "
"; AT 9,12; "    "
3040 IF N=3 THEN PRINT AT 7,18; "
"; AT 9,18; "    "
3050 LET B=B-C
3060 PRINT AT 17,0; "
"
3070 PRINT AT 17,0; "YOUR BALANCE
IS $ "; B
3071 FOR V=1 TO 30
3072 NEXT V
3075 IF B<=0 THEN GOTO 3500
3090 PAUSE 50
3120 GOTO 490
3500 CLS
3510 PRINT AT 8,0; "SORRY... YOU
ARE FLAT BROKE."
3520 PRINT AT 10,0; "OUT OF "; Q; "
ATTEMPTS,"
3530 PRINT AT 12,0; "YOU WERE COR
RECT "; R; " TIMES."
3540 LET P=R/Q
3550 LET P=P*100
3560 PRINT AT 14,0; "SUCCESS RATE
= "; P; " PERCENT"
3570 PRINT AT 19,0; "PRESS ANY
Y TO START OVER"
3580 PAUSE 4E4
3590 CLS
3600 GOTO 70
5000 STOP
5010 SAVE "PEA"
5020 RUN
```

SOFTAID
Feed The World

There is a cassette tape available featuring ten top hit game programs from England, for the Spectrum computer. All proceeds from the sale of the software go to the BAND-AID TRUST FUND to aid starving Ethiopians. The Band-Aid project was first implemented when British Pop Music Stars recorded and donated a Christmas song for the effort. The "greatest hits" tape is called SOFTAID, and contains the following games: Spellbound (Beyond), Starbike (The Edge), Kokotoni Wilf (Elite), The Pyramid (Fantasy), Horace Goes Ski-ing (Melbourne House/Psion), Gilligan's Gold (Ocean), Ant Attack (Quicksilva), 3D Tank Duel (Real-Time), Sorcery (Virgin), and Jack and the Beanstalk (Thor). On the "flip" side of the tape is the recorded version of the song "Do They Know It's Christmas?"

Rod Cousens of Quicksilva organised the software relief project, and hopes that it will raise some £200,000 for the Ethiopians. Here in the U.S. the SOFTAID Spectrum tape is available from Susan Ziegler, Software Services, 14307 BenBrush, San Antonio, TX 78248, for a mere $6.25 plus $2.00 for first class p & h. Bob Dyl of the English Micro Connection, 15 kilburn Ct., Newport, RI 02840 will also have substantial supplies of SOFTAID shortly. The British software producers have been very generous in their efforts. The tape is very reasonably priced, and everyone should obtain their own copy...pirated versions won't help dying people one bit. Note: There is also a version for the Commodore 64.

SCROLLING

Do you get tired of the incredibly slow and jerky SCROLL command on the TS1000? Take heart true programmers. The following machine code program will not only permit you to SCROLL up It will also permit SCROLL down, SCROLL left, and SCROLL right.

After you type in the program SAVE it. Then RUN the program. The program is then stored safely above RAMTOP so that you can use it with any program. To use the SCROLLs use this line in your program:

```
LET Z=USR X
where X=32521 for SCROLL up
        32542 for SCROLL down
        32566 for SCROLL right
        32536 for SCROLL left
```

```
1 REM  1234567890123456789012З
4567890123456789012345678901234S
6789012345678901234567890123456?
89012345678901
2 LET A$="21097F220440EB01550
0219240EDB0C9ED5B0040121210019Q
1F602EDB006202B7110FCC92A0C4011F
602424B19EB21210019EBEDB30620237
110FCC90176172A0C401600237EB9260
4725718F710F3C90176192A104015002
B7EB92804725718F710F3C9"
3 FAST
4 LET A=16514
5 FOR B=1 TO LEN A$-1 STEP 2
6 POKE A,16*CODE A$(B)+CODE A
$(B+1)-476
7 LET A=A+1
8 NEXT B
9 RAND USR 16514
10 NEW
```

BRIAN LITTLE

Tassman Interface Update
Art Johnson

After having problems with my Tassman interface, I called E.A. Brown. He told me Ramex, the Tassman distributer, recently had all the interfaces that they imported and distributed in North America modified by Tassman to run the Ramex disk drive. They are not compatable with anyone elses system. If you are ordering a Tassman interface you must specify a type 'B', if not you will be sent a type 'C' which is only compatable with a Ramex Disk System.

QL COMMENTARY
by Norm Lehfeldt

The much-anticipated Sinclair QL has finally lurched onto the American market (See preliminary review in this issue).

It is disturbing to see that, with such a spectacular machine on its hands, Sinclair U.S.A. shows signs of shooting itself in the foot (or even feet).

The highly publicized organizational and financial uncertainties of the parent company are surely to blame for Sinclair's inability to deliver American QL's in a timely fashion. But those difficulties do not excuse the contemptuous fashion in which Sinclair U.S.A. treats would-be customers and dealer-supporters.

Some examples:

Those who ordered QL's from American Express in May received their machines _after_ those who ordered from Sinclair in June and July. It seems likely that Sinclair was chaffing at the discount it was giving American Express (both companies were retailing the machine at the same price) and was trying to provoke American Express customers into cancelling their orders and re-ordering from Sinclair.

Sinclair refuses to discount to dealers anything in their small catalogue. The only chance of success in America remaining to Sinclair is to get their products into as wide distribution as possible, as quickly and cheaply as possible. It is sheer stupidity not to take advantage of the help being offered.

When one calls the Sinclair order or customer service numbers one gets a bored-sounding woman who does not seem to know quite where she is (Customer Service answered "Customer Service" without mentioning Sinclair. I had to ask to be sure who I was talking to on a transcontinental call.), what she is doing, or how to do it. Placing a small order recently, I was repeatedly put on hold while the order-taker apparently asked someone else what to do next.

It is time Sinclair realized that it is _us_--Users Groups, Dealers and Importers, Software Authors, Peripheral Manufacturers--who have kept interest in Sinclair technology alive through the long arid spell between the collapse of Timex and the introduction of the QL. Everyone sitting there on their tails in Nashua, New Hampshire owes their job to _us_!

Speaking as a member of the family, Sinclair U.S.A.'s present surly, aloof attitude simply will _not_ do. We are not, after all, living in the days when people were falling all over themselves to buy ZX81's!

Perhaps Sir Clive should send Nigel Searle a copy of "In Search of Excellence."

1500 TAPE LABELS

adapted from James G. DuPuy
by Barbara Stolle

Here is an adapted version of the 2068 program that creates labels with an index for your cassette tapes. Type it in as listed, or LOAD the cassette copy that I have donated to the tape library (LOAD "TAPE LABEL"). We T/S 1000/1500 users will not be out-done!

```
YOUR TAPE TITLE

    SIDE:A           SIDE:B

PROGRAM 1  >10   PROGRAM 5  >10
ECT        >50
```

```
YOUR TAPE TITLE
```
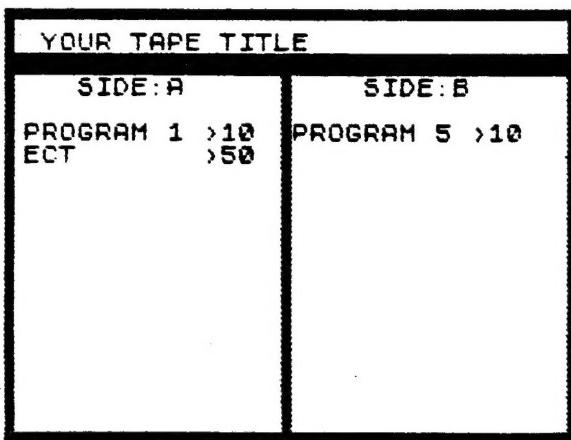
```
1 FAST
2 FOR N=0 TO 21
3 PRINT "                       "
4 NEXT N
5 SLOW
6 FOR N=0 TO 10
7 PRINT AT 9,6;"** STOP THE T
APE **"
8 PRINT AT 11,6;"**TURN ON PR
INTER**"
9 PRINT AT 9,6;"** STOP THE T
APE **"
10 PRINT AT 11,6;"**TURN ON PR
INTER**"
11 NEXT N
12 PRINT AT 2,9;"TAPE LABELER"
13 PRINT AT 5,3;"THIS IS A PRO
GRAM THAT";AT 6,3;"WILL CREATE A
 LABEL FOR"
14 PRINT AT 7,3;"YOUR CASSETTE
S.  MAKE";AT 8,3;"SURE THAT YOUR
 PROGRAM"
15 PRINT AT 9,3;"TITLES ARE NO
T OVER 10";AT 10,3;"CHARACTERS L
ONG."
16 PRINT AT 11,5;"                "
17 PRINT AT 12,5;"TO SKIP TO S
IDE B";AT 13,5;"OR TO SKIP SIDE
A"
18 PRINT AT 14,5;"JUST PRESS E
NTER AT";AT 15,5;"THE PROGRAM TI
TLE"
19 PRINT AT 16,5;"PROMPTS.";AT
18,3;"WHEN READY TO START";AT 1
9,3;"PRESS ENTER"
25 INPUT Z$
30 CLS
35 PRINT AT 1,0;"
36 PRINT AT 2,0;"     ";TAB 31;"
40 PRINT AT 3,0;"
41 PRINT AT 20,0;"
50 FOR N=4 TO 19
60 PRINT AT N,0;"
61 PRINT AT N,15;"
62 PRINT AT N,31;"
70 NEXT N
80 PRINT AT 4,4;"SIDE:A"
81 PRINT AT 4,20;"SIDE:B"
120 PRINT AT 21,2;"ENTER TAPE T
ITLE OR NUMBER"
130 INPUT A$
131 IF A$="" THEN GOTO 130
135 PRINT AT 2,2;A$
140 LET O=1
150 FOR M=6 TO 19
155 PRINT AT 21,0;"
160 PRINT AT 21,0;"ENTER TITLE
FOR SIDE A ITEM ";O
170 INPUT B$
171 IF B$="" THEN GOTO 210
178 PRINT AT M,1;B$
180 PRINT AT 21,0;"ENTER INDEX
NUMBER FOR ITEM ";O
185 INPUT I$
190 PRINT AT M,11;">";I$
195 LET O=O+1
200 NEXT M
201 GOTO 150
210 LET O=1
215 FOR M=6 TO 19
220 PRINT AT 21,0;"
230 PRINT AT 21,0;"ENTER TITLE
FOR SIDE B ITEM ";O
240 INPUT B$
241 IF B$="" THEN GOTO 297
245 PRINT AT M,16;B$
250 PRINT AT 21,0;"ENTER INDEX
NUMBER FOR ITEM ";O
260 INPUT I$
270 PRINT AT M,26;">";I$
280 LET O=O+1
290 NEXT M
291 GOTO 215
297 PRINT AT 21,0;"
300 COPY
305 CLS
310 PRINT "        ";AT 2,0;"
316 PRINT AT 1,0;"   ";AT 1,31;"
318 PRINT AT 21,2;"ENTER TAPE T
ITLE OR NUMBER"
319 INPUT A$
320 IF A$="" THEN GOTO 319
321 PRINT AT 1,2;A$
322 PRINT AT 21,0;"
323 COPY
335 PRINT AT 14,0;"FOR ANOTHER
RUN PRESS ENTER"
340 INPUT X$
345 IF X$="" THEN GOTO 30
350 STOP
355 SAVE "TAPE LABEL"
360 RUN
```

COMPUTER CALENDAR

O C T O B E R
---

20 Peninsula User Group   1:00

24 East Bay User Group   7:30

29 Silicon Valley User Group   7:00
    Meeting, Cupertino Library

30 Silicon Valley User Group   7:00
    Workshop, Great Western Savings
    Cupertino

N O V E M B E R
---

17 Peninsula User Group   1:00

21 East Bay User Group   7:30
    (One week earlier due to
                 Thanksgiving)

26 Silicon Valley User Group   7:00
    Meeting, Cupertino Library

27 Silicon Valley User Group   7:00
    Workshop, Great Western Savings
    Cupertino

D E C E M B E R
---

15 Peninsula User Group   1:00

19 East Bay User Group   7:30
    (One week earlier due to
                 Christmas)

26 Silicon Valley User Group   7:00
    Workshop, Great Western Savings
    Cupertino

31 Silicon Valley User Group   7:00
    Regular Meeting
    Cupertino Library

E B Z U G EAST BAY Z80 USER GROUP
654 40TH STREET
RICHMOND, CALIFORNIA 94805
(415) 234-3310

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(415) 359-3198

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1783 EL CAMINO REAL
BURLINGAME

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6675 CLIFFORD DRIVE
CUPERTINO, CALIFORNIA 95014
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PRESIDENT: RITA CARR, (408) 738-2888, X-4579

MEETINGS: NO REGULAR TIME OR PLACE FOR MEETINGS.
SEE COMPUTER CALENDAR FOR MEETING INFORMATION
OR CALL (408) 253-3175.

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(CONT. FROM FRONT PAGE)

Based on very limited experience, here are some thoughts on the four Psion programs supplied with the QL:

QL Database is as much a new language as a new program. Its facilities seem quite extensive. Rob Curry is using it for his customer database and reports that it really needs disc-drive support when large data storage is contemplated. This seems to be true of all the Psion programs.

QL Spreadsheet provides a massive utility of over 16,000 cells! It has all the expected functions and seems very fast.

QL Business Graphics is almost as easy to use as the Sinclair hype suggests. It takes any data you give it and organizes and re-organizes it into various types and sizes of bar, line and circle graphs. It allows lots of experimenting without re-inputting data and can provide monochrome or color print-outs depending on the printer connected. (All four Psion programs operate in the QL's high-resolution mode which allows only four colors on the screen.)

QL Word Processing is the program I have used most (this article is written with it) and it is the most disappointing.

The program's text manipulation, command structure and help facilities are what you'd expect. But its printer control facilities are crude and its RAM text space practically non-existent.

As it loads up it is configured to provide bold and underlined text on the screen and to transmit codes for these modes to Epson-compatible printers. Through a cumbersome process it is possible to modify the printer drivers (several are provided) or create a new driver that will invoke other printer features. But there is no way to imbed such codes directly in your text, nor to alter the screen prompts to reflect any changed codes. It is possible to put several versions of the printer driver, each supporting different printer modes, on the cartridge, but rotating among them in a practical setting is messy and time-consuming.

QL Word Processing will support only about 3 pages of text in RAM (in the 128K QL) before calling for microdrive storage! There seems to be some extremely inefficient coding at work here. How a capable software house like Psion could have created such a limited program for a machine as powerful as the QL is a perplexing question. Perhaps someone else will be able to do better.

Speed in computer mass storage has become as automobile horsepower was in the '50's and '60's--everyone wants more whether they need it or not. There is no question that a sequential storage medium such as the Sinclair microdrives can not be as fast as disc storage--and in applications where one wishes to conduct searches on a data base larger than the 100K a single microdrive cartridge supports, the disc is clearly more practical.

But for the kind of computing most of us do at home (and in small offices) I can't find anything to complain about in the microdrives. Their small size and their integration into the QL's case make them elegant in my view. The unreliability commented on in the English press seems to have been a problem in early samples, although the cartridges themselves do seem more delicate than, say, the A & J wafers. But in the first week of use I have had no difficulties with the Sinclair drives. Users with longer experience than I are reporting similar experience.

Support for the QL is beginning to pick up steam. Curry Computer publishes an extensive hardware and software catalogue and ships promptly. Rob Curry tests memory expansions, interfaces, etc. and gives honest advice as to what works and what doesn't. English Micro Connection is including some QL items in its catalogue and Zebra Systems has announced similar intentions.

The success of all of this enterprise depends on QL sales in the U.S. So far no one seems to have seen an American QL with a serial number above about 2000.